

SALTON SEA ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

March 27, 2007

8:30 – 2:00

California Department of Food and Agriculture, Sacramento, CA

Welcome and Introductions

Secretary for Resources, Mike Chrisman, welcomed the Committee Members and led introductions of those present (see attached list).

Updates from the Resources Agency

Secretary Chrisman provided an overview of the prior Committee Meeting held on February 27 and the purpose of today's meeting. At the February 27 meeting, the Committee Members discussed the process for identifying a preferred alternative and the potential components of a preferred alternative. Based on this discussion, the Department of Water Resources (DWR) and Department of Fish and Game (DFG) staff were directed to prepare a composite or proposed preferred alternative. This proposed preferred alternative will be presented at today's meeting. Additionally, the State will be accepting comments and suggestions on the proposed preferred alternative today, and will take these into account as the preferred alternative is finalized. The preferred alternative recommendation to the Legislature is likely to be made in late April.

Public Comments

The following public comment was provided:

- A member of the public noted that the project website does not contain all of the comments that were submitted on the Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR). Specifically, all of the attachments are not provided on the website. Ms. Dale Hoffman-Floerke, DWR, noted that all of the comments received have been posted. Attachments to the comments were not included unless they were specific to the analysis or content of the Draft PEIR.

Proposed Preferred Alternative

Dale Hoffman-Floerke, DWR, provided an overview of the formulation of the preferred alternative and an overview of the proposed preferred alternative. There is a dual process for development of the preferred alternative. This process includes input from the Process Working Group and input from the public, agencies, and stakeholders. Additionally, the over 33,000 comment letters received on the Draft PEIR were also considered in the formulation of the preferred alternative.

The proposed preferred alternative was developed using the legislative objectives, the Advisory Committee's process for identifying a preferred alternative, and comments received from the public. The legislation identified three "mandated" goals and objectives. These mandated goals focused on (1) providing the maximum feasible attainment of long term stable aquatic and shoreline habitat for the historic levels and diversity of fish and wildlife that depend on the Salton Sea; (2) elimination of air quality impacts from the restoration project to the extent feasible; and (3) protection of water quality. The Advisory Committee process for identifying a preferred alternative included three "steps", which were: (1) formation of the Preferred Alternative Process Working Group; (2) identification of process and attributes by the Working Group; and, (3) review, prioritization, and scoring of attributes by the Technical Working Groups and reporting results to the Preferred Alternative Process Working Group. Public comments provided on the Draft PEIR and at the various public outreach meetings were also considered.

The results of the Technical Working Groups and the Preferred Alternative Process Working Group were presented at the February 27, 2007 Advisory Committee Meeting. The Committee discussed the results and commented that the preferred alternative should: (1) include Saline Habitat Complex and a Marine Sea; (2) include Early Start Habitat; (3) protect air quality; (4) protect water quality to improve habitat; and (5) improve odor problems. The Committee also suggested that the preferred alternative be based on Alternative 5, with some components from other alternatives added.

Ms. Hoffman-Floerke noted that based on the legislative objectives, the Advisory Committee's process for identifying a preferred alternative, the Advisory Committee's comments and suggestions at the February 27, 2007 meeting, and comments received from the public, the State has developed a preferred alternative proposal. The proposed preferred alternative includes 62,000 acres of Saline Habitat Complex in the southern portion of the Salton Sea, a 34,000-acre Marine Sea in the northern portion and extending along the western and eastern shoreline, and air quality management actions. The proposed preferred alternative is based on Alternative 5 and incorporates components from Alternatives 2 and 3. In 2078, it is estimated that the proposed preferred alternative would include 109,000 acres of Exposed Playa and a 29,000-acre Brine Sink. The Marine Sea would have a maximum depth of about 12 meters (about 39 feet) to minimize the uncertainty related to hydrogen sulfide issues. Additionally, the Marine Sea under the proposed preferred alternative would continue to be the largest water-body in the Southern California area.

Ms. Hoffman-Floerke noted that additional components could be considered during project-level analysis including, a recreation/estuary lake in the southern portion of the current Salton Sea, a storage reservoir for IID, water treatment facilities including treatment wetlands on the New and Alamo rivers, and Saline Habitat Complex in the northern portion of the Salton Sea. It was noted that these things are not "off the table", but are too specific to include in the current proposed preferred alternative. It was noted that a variety of studies and engineering design evaluations would be needed to implement the proposed preferred alternative.

The Committee Members discussed the proposed preferred alternative in detail. The following provides a summary of the major discussion topics and concerns raised.

- Geothermal provides an important source of “green” energy for the State. Access should be provided for future geothermal development in the southern portion of the Salton Sea. Geothermal areas should also be shown on the maps for the proposed preferred alternative. The geothermal resource is located in a finite area and extraction facilities must also be located within this general area.
- Saline Habitat Complex in the northern portion of the Salton Sea at the confluence with the Whitewater River should be included in the preferred alternative.
- Public access to exposed playa areas should be limited. Disturbance of the playa could increase the potential for the playa to become emissive.
- Recreational uses of the air quality management canal should be considered further.
- The proposed preferred alternative includes a Marine Sea at elevation -230 feet mean sea level. The State should indicate who would be responsible for air quality management actions on the area between the current Salton Sea elevation (about -228) and the Marine Sea elevation under the proposed preferred alternative.
- Testing and pilot studies for air quality management should be conducted.
- The amount of Saline Habitat Complex included in the proposed preferred alternative may be more than is necessary to replace “historic levels.” The State should consider reducing this amount to around 40,000 to 50,000 acres with around 5,000 of this in the northern portion of the Sea. However, some members of the Committee disagreed and noted that 62,000 acres of Saline Habitat Complex would be appropriate. Additionally, Alternative 2, which has 75,000 acres of Saline Habitat Complex, was consistently ranked higher than the other alternatives by the Technical Working Groups and the Preferred Alternative Process Working Group. This indicates the importance of a large area of Saline Habitat Complex.
- A recreational lake of about 5,000 to 7,000 acres in the southern portion of the Salton Sea should be added.
- Fish reintroductions should be considered during project-level analysis.
- A larger Marine Sea should be considered.

Some Committee Members requested more detailed information including construction and operations and maintenance costs prior to providing a recommendation to the Secretary on a preferred alternative. Committee Members suggested that this information needs to be parallel in content and level of detail to the information provided

in the Draft PEIR. Additionally, some Committee Members requested cost information on constructing the proposed preferred alternative using varying Marine Sea depths (i.e., costs with a Marine Sea that is 8 meters deep, 10 meters deep, and 12 meters deep).

Additionally, some Committee Members noted that much of the specific details can be worked out during project-level analysis and that the Committee should support the proposed preferred alternative. However, other members of the Committee noted that the proposed preferred alternative is not acceptable as currently configured.

Secretary Chrisman noted that he anticipated providing a recommendation on a preferred alternative to the State Legislature by the end of April. Based on questions from Committee Members, Ms. Hoffman-Floerke noted that DWR will post cost and phasing information on the proposed preferred alternative on the project website. This information should be available in about 10 days.

Senator Denise Ducheny commented that the Committee has undertaken a substantial effort and thanked the Committee Members for all of their work on the project. The Senator noted that there is an opportunity to move forward with the project and obtain funding for next year to start Early Start Habitat.

Five Year Plan

Ms. Hoffman-Floerke provided an overview of the Five Year Plan. The plan is not a requirement of the PEIR process. The Five Year Plan identifies actions that could occur during the first five years after Legislative action on a preferred alternative. The Plan will include actions necessary to implement the preferred alternative, such as the following: environmental documentation and permitting; various demonstration projects; execution of site access agreements; air quality, water quality, and biological monitoring; preparation of the necessary feasibility studies; and completion of final design. The actions identified in the Five Year Plan would be needed regardless which alternative is selected as the preferred alternative. The Five Year Plan is currently being developed and will be available with the Final PEIR. Implementation of the Five Year Plan requires adoption of a preferred alternative and related implementing legislation. Additionally, funding and identification of an implementing entity are also needed.

The Committee provided the following comments and suggestions relative to the Five Year Plan:

- The Plan should include establishment of a Salton Sea baseline emissions inventory. This emissions inventory would be critical in understanding the sources and levels of air pollutants.
- Initiation of discussions with a Federal partner should be included in the Five Year Plan.

- Water quality monitoring and modeling should receive more consideration in the Five Year Plan.
- The Plan should include additional funding and financing studies.

Summary of Action Items

The Secretary thanked DWR, DFG, and CH2M HILL for all of their good work over the past three years. This effort, with the help and input from the Committee Members and public input will culminate in the recommendation of a preferred alternative to the Legislature. The Resources Agency, in conjunction with DWR and DFG, will work to provide as much specificity as possible on the preferred alternative and the Five Year Plan. The Secretary thanked the Committee Members for all of their efforts and hard work over the past three years.

Handouts

Copies of the following presentations and handouts:

- Preferred Alternative Proposal
- Five Year Plan

ATTENDANCE

Advisory Committee Members or Alternates Present:

Steve Birdsall, Imperial County Air Pollution Control District
Larry Biland, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Fred Cagle, Sierra Club
Bart Christensen, State Water Resources Control Board
Michael Cohen, Pacific Institute
Bill DuBois, California Farm Bureau Federation
Bill Gaines, California Waterfowl Association
Elston Grubaugh, Imperial Irrigation District
Bob Ham, Imperial Valley Association of Governments
Rick Hoffman, Riverside County
Al Kalin, Imperial County Farm Bureau
Julia Levin, Audubon California
Al Loya, Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians
Dan Parks, Coachella Valley Water District
Larry Purcell, San Diego County Water Authority
Tom Raftican, United Anglers of Southern California
Vincent Signorotti, Geothermal Energy Association
Pete Silva, The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California
Larry Walkoviak, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
John Wohlmuth, Coachella Valley Association of Governments
Nancy Wright, Colorado River Basin Regional Water Quality Control Board
Gary Wyatt, Imperial County